

Listen and Learn Tour Executive Summary

Lieutenant Governor Sue Ellspermann was elected to her position in November 2012. After presiding as President of the Indiana Senate in 2013, she began a tour of all 92 counties in Indiana. Dubbed the “Listen and Learn Tour,” the initiative began with the first visit to Allen County on May 2 and concluding visit to Dubois County, the Lt. Governor’s home county, on November 22.



Each county visit included two separate meetings. The first meeting was for all elected officials in the county. Business and agriculture leaders were invited to the second meeting. These 184 meetings were attended by 2,500 people.

Lieutenant Governor Ellspermann used the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) self-analysis tool as the format for each meeting. She added a question about how Indiana government can be a better partner.

Although many varied comments and different perspectives were shared with Lieutenant Governor Ellspermann, some issues were more repeated often. In almost all counties both the elected officials and the business and agricultural leaders cited many positives about their own communities and the state in general. They praised the State’s positive attitude toward business and agriculture, including sound fiscal management and sensible regulatory environment. Many private industry and public officials acknowledged the value of the agriculture industry to Indiana’s overall economy. There was also a pervasive pride in the people of their communities with many mentions of voluntary civic, social service and educational activities.

Local elected officials shared their accomplishments in improving services as well as their overall fiscal challenges. They gratefully acknowledged the increase in local road funding included in the 2013 State Budget. Other related issues were unfunded federal mandates and the costs of dealing with a growing drug problem in both rural and urban counties. Many communities also mentioned the negative impact of blighted properties on neighborhoods and business districts.



As previously noted, business and agriculture leaders praised the business-friendly environment in Indiana. The one overarching issue that was cited in two-thirds of the counties was the need for a better trained and prepared workforce. In some counties business and agriculture leaders



referenced successful programs within Ivy Tech Community College and Vincennes University. Employers also expressed concern not only about the technical training but about the lack of “soft skills” such as reliability, problem solving and basic communications, which are lacking in too many applicants. Regarding the workforce, they also expressed concern about the brain drain from smaller communities and how they

can develop programs to retain and attract talent. Government and private sector officials in all parts of the state were optimistic in the opportunities for economic development and job creation. They identified transportation infrastructure as critical to growth as well as the availability of construction-ready sites in many communities. Again, the broad scope of the agriculture industry from farming to food processing was noted as a key factor for economic growth. An additional economic development factor that was identified in many rural counties was the lack of broadband and high-speed internet service. In many regions, the communities see tourism, including the emerging agri-tourism market, as an opportunity for commercial growth.

The “Listen and Learn Tour” accomplished its purpose of allowing local elected officials and business and agriculture leaders in all 92 counties to have meaningful conversations with Lieutenant Governor Ellspermann. The comments noted in the report have already resulted in several projects in State government including pending legislation to improve the building permit approval process, the formation of a rural broadband working group led by the Lieutenant Governor Ellspermann and Secretary of Commerce Victor Smith, and a blighted properties demolition program through the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority. The comments about workforce needs have been shared with the Indiana Career Council, for which the Lieutenant Governor is vice-chair, and the Regional Works Councils.

